

Your introduction to

Getting Deep, Delicious Sleep

From a Sleep Savvy Hypnotherapist's POV



Introduction

You already know what suffering with insomnia is like. We've all been through it. You try to sleep, you desperately want to sleep, but yet you find yourself tossing and turning, getting up, lying down again and nothing seems to help. No matter how tired you feel physically, sleep seems elusive. Then when you do finally fall asleep, you wake three or four hours later and can not find your way back to sweet slumber.

What can you do? Consider self-hypnosis. It's a proven strategy for getting to sleep and getting back to sleep when you awaken in the middle of the night.

THE THREE STAGES LEADING TO SLEEP

You may not realize it, but every night you pass through three stages on your way to sleep:

The Thinking Stage, The Fantasy or Imagination Stage and The Hypnoidal Stage.

Understanding these stages can help you to transition through them faster if needed.

When you first get into bed, you start **Thinking** about the events of the day, the TV show you just watched, what will happen tomorrow, why so-and-so said this or that, bills you need to pay, upcoming plans, arguments, unfinished business, in short, a thousand different things. I like to call this "daytime thinking" and it lands you clearly in the Thinking Stage, or the first stage leading to sleep.

Next, whether you are aware of it or not, you naturally slip into **Fantasy** as your mind turns to thoughts associated with relaxation, future vacations, travel, time with friends, past enjoyable memories, special days, places or people that make you feel relaxed.

Then, as your mind eases and your muscles begin to relax you enter a light stage of hypnosis called the **Hypnoidal Stage**. You are still conscious but you begin to experience some time distortion and a little bit of amnesia, such as not being able to remember each and every thought or the exact moment that you fell asleep. You must enter this stage of sleep even if it is very brief in order to get actual unconscious sleep.

Reaching the Hypnoidal stage is key to resting well and self hypnosis techniques can help you get there.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SLEEP

The strategy for maintaining sleep throughout the night is based on two elements of human behavior. First, as we approach sleep, we become more "suggestible" or easily influenced. This usually occurs in the Hypnoidal Stage. Second, We are most suggestible to ourselves. Our own thoughts act as powerful self-suggestions and are readily accepted by the subconscious mind much more effectively than suggestions from anyone else in our lives.

This is true of all of us. We talk ourselves into things and out of things all the time! We set goals, give ourselves lectures, create excuses that we then believe. We usually believe the majority of what we are telling ourselves. We are more likely to follow through on our own instructions than those we receive from anyone else, including loved ones or even mentors. We trust in ourselves.

We can use our “self-suggestibility” in a healthy way to set the stage for deep, delicious sleep. For example, as you get into bed, direct your mind away from daytime thinking and out of the Thinking Stage as quickly as possible. Sometimes we don’t realize we are still in the Thinking Stage, even after we have practiced this for a while, but once we realize it, we need to give ourselves permission to set aside the thoughts without judgment, and to move into the Fantasy Stage.

Give yourself a “suggestion” out loud or silently in your mind. Tell yourself it is okay to set aside the thoughts of the day, that you need to get deep, delicious, restorative sleep to be at your best and think the most clearly. Remind yourself that you can come back to those thoughts tomorrow with fresh eyes and energy. This might sound something like: “I give myself permission to set aside the thoughts of the day so I can rest deeply and get the sleep I need and deserve”.

If you tend to find yourself worrying at night say to yourself- “It is okay to set aside worry, during my sleep state, as worrying accomplishes nothing”. “I deserve peaceful, restful sleep.”

When we tell ourselves this, we are more likely to follow the suggestion or advice, because we heard it from the person we usually believe most- ourself!

STOP THINKING START SLEEPING

How does “setting the stage” help? It encourages our conscious and unconscious mind to spend as little time as possible in the Thinking Stage. Ideally it allows you to skip the Thinking Stage altogether. So when you catch yourself circling through those real-world thoughts, direct your thoughts toward specific images, memories or fantasies that you associate with relaxation. This accelerates your entry into the Fantasy Stage.

This doesn't mean fantasizing as you might usually think about it. Daydreams, "wish I woulda" or "I shoulda" moments or sexual fantasies might help but may not lead to deep relaxation. It is important to create, store and use memories that you already associate with relaxation and calm in addition. For example, I have a client who remembers and revisits a beautiful waterfall in Maui. Another client visualizes a perfect, imaginary round of golf on one of his favorite courses. I personally use a memory of relaxing on a sailboat in a slip on a lazy, warm afternoon or my memory of a perfect autumn day in New England laying in the grass watching the bright leaves, floating to the ground in a swirl of color against the crisp, blue sky.

Turning on imagination is also wildly helpful. Imagination is like the key that opens the door to the subconscious mind. So go ahead and imagine what it would be like to be your favorite character in your favorite movie or book. Imagine what it would be like to win the lottery or play your favorite sport professionally. I enjoy imagining I am skating through my ice castle passing beautiful ice sculptures and ice chandeliers. The sky's the limit so activate your imagination. Begin to actively create the dream you want to have once you enter the Unconscious Stage of sleep.

Use those images to guide yourself to the Unconscious Sleep Stage. Cradle them in your consciousness, let your mind and body relax and you will be drawn almost magnetically into the Hypnoidal Stage that leads, smoothly and pleasantly to Unconscious Sleep and real rest.

Hypnosis, or the Hypnoidal Stage, is the bridge to sleep. Walk yourself across it! Try it for a few nights. You'll be amazed at the benefits.

BEWARE OF TOXIC WORRY

But what to do when you wake in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep? Sometimes your glucose levels or blood sugar levels have dropped enough to wake you. This might be due to drinking alcohol which contains lots of sugar too close to bedtime or perhaps because you didn't eat enough protein during the day to last you through the night. However, waking in the middle of the night is often the result of "toxic worry".

Uncontrolled worrying is really like a poison or toxin. When we are worried about something that will occur the next day, or worried about something important going on in our lives, it can interrupt a sound sleep and keep us awake for hours thereafter. It's like children who are excited about Santa coming on Christmas Eve. They too have difficulty getting to and maintaining sleep...though their reason (and the pay-off!) is much, much nicer.

Worry is very normal and probably inescapable to some degree. But in this situation it is "toxic" because there is not a single thing you can do to solve or address the problem at that moment. No business is being done, others we may want to contact are sleeping and even if they are available now would not be the time to confront them with your concerns. You are most likely tired and stressed and not at your best. Sleep is the only really good answer.

Toxic worry is like the rust of life. It will eat away at your life day and night if you let it. Toxic worry is often about things that are out of our control like other people's thoughts or behaviors, the weather, the economy, etc. It is important to recognize what is within your control and what is not. If it is not in your control, you must find a way to let it go. It can be very helpful to use a tool or create a practice to do this daily such as prayer or creating a worry box sometimes called a God or Angel Box. If you tend to it daily, you will have less toxic worry on your mind when you head to bed.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SLEEP

Setting the stage for sleep as we discussed earlier is a great way to begin. If you have effectively "suggested" to yourself that you are ready for good sleep, that you deserve it, then the natural worries of modern life are less likely to become toxic. Yet sometimes no matter how well we prepare ourselves, we do wake up in the middle of the night due to a barking dog, change in temperature, a loud noise, a light or just to go to the bathroom. If we are not careful, the troublesome thoughts can use this as an opportunity to invade our mind again and we find ourselves right back at square one.

The good news is, whether it is toxic worry or not, you can use this simple self-hypnosis strategy to help you get back to sleep.

Step 1. Become aware of your breathing. It may take some practice, but concentrate on the normal, relaxed rhythm of inhaling...and exhaling. Deepen your breath slightly, perhaps stretching out the inhales and exhales slightly or concentrating on filling the back of the lungs or lowest lobes of the lungs as you breath in and out.

Step 2. Begin repeating this series of words only as you exhale using a soft, drowsy, relaxed sounding voice out loud or in your mind.

PEACEFUL...

RESTFUL...

SLEEP...

Or

PEACEFUL...

DEEP...

RESTFUL...

SLEEP...

The repetition of words, silent or spoken, prevents you from going back into the Thinking Stage which would likely prevent sleep. Consider the repetition as a substitute for your natural Fantasy Stage. With practice , you will most likely be back asleep within 5 to 10 repetitions. The words are self-suggestions in themselves and deepening the breath reminds the part of your brain responsible for sleep that it is okay to stay, or return, to the calm place otherwise known as "rest and digest".

Insomnia of any kind is a nasty, insidious beast. It can ruin a good night and make the following day more difficult than it needs to be. But luckily, these self-hypnosis techniques have worked for many other people and they can work for you!